

Land, Water and People

In Search of Balance

By Mike Blakeman

Travel management, that is the management of motorized and non-motorized travel on the Forest, is always controversial. Every form of travel has associated special interest groups. Most of these groups are a tremendous help providing education to their members, organizing group outings, and doing volunteer trail maintenance work. Leaders of these groups advocate for their special interests by staying informed and providing excellent comments on Forest projects and direction.

Recently, the Rio Grande National Forest held four public meetings in different SLV communities to share and review draft motor vehicle use maps (called, of course, MVUMs). There were two objectives for the meetings:

1. Give people a first peek at MVUMs.
2. Use the expertise of Forest users to help find mistakes on the draft maps.

The final version of the Motor vehicle use maps will show only the motorized roads and trails on the Forest—non-motorized trails will not be included. The maps are being developed based on the decision for the Forest's 1996 Revised Forest Plan. This decision identified the legal motorized and non-motorized trails on the Rio Grande National Forest.

Special interest group leaders and members were out in force for the MVUM meetings. While not part of the agenda, many of these folks were advocating for their special travel interests. Some would like the Forest Service to open every road and trail that ever existed to motorized use. Others would have the Forest close almost every road and trail to motorized use. Most people advocate for a balance of uses, but the perfect balance point is different for everyone.

If all goes well, the motor vehicle use maps will be printed and ready for distribution this September. Since travel use patterns and demands have significantly changed since 1996, the Forest will then embark on a new round of travel management planning in order to find that elusive perfect balance point of motorized and non-motorized roads and trails, as well as a good mixture of single track and double track trails (motorcycle and ATV trails). This will eventually lead to a new MVUM.

During the travel management planning process, the Forest will consider the comments and proposals from the public and other agencies. This input will direct the analysis of potential impacts to physical resources (soil and water) and wildlife, as well as consider social concerns, laws and budget (roads and trails need to be maintained).

Ultimately, the Forest hopes to have a good mixture of roads and trails that meet the recreational needs of all users while allowing for acceptable impacts to soil, water and wildlife. No matter the final outcome, there will always be unhappy people as some folks believe the perfect balance point is the one that favors their special interests over all others.

While the Forest Service motto of, "Caring for the Land, and Serving the People" appears simple, implementation is complex indeed.

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